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ABSTRACT

The major objective of this study was to identify verbally reticent (V.R.) students in the community college population, beginning with first-term speech students. A total of 527 students enrolled in first-term daytime speech classes completed the V.R. Scale (Verbal Reticence Test Developed by Myron W. Lustig) during the first week of classes. Results showed that, as a group, community college students are more reluctant to engage in various kinds of verbal behavior than students enrolled in large four-year universities; that the higher students' grade point averages, the less reticent they are likely to be; that the newer a student is to the college environment, the more likely it is that verbal restraint will manifest itself; and that vocational-technical students lack the same level of self-assurance held by students intending to obtain associate or bachelor's degrees. A copy of the V.R. Scale and tables of findings are included. (JM)

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STUDENT NEEDS ASSESSMENT:

TESTING FOR VERBAL RETICENCE

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Timidity, shyness, anxiety, fear, and stress seem to be "givens" in life. Most speakers have felt at least one of these emotions prior to, or during, some of their speaking experiences. But for the reticent individual,[1] coping becomes withdrawal and, frequently, a seriously impaired effectiveness in person-to-person dealings.

During the 1974-1975 school year, the Speech Department at Portland Community College conducted the first stage of a continuing student needs assessment review. The investigation focused on maladaptive speech behavior, with particular attention to the verbally reticent student. This paper describes the results of the reticence study and describes the relatively new screening/testing instrument which was used to identify the verbally reticent (V.R.) student in the community college population.

The major objective of the study was to discover how many first term speech students were reticent. In addition

to numbers, however, we wanted to know:

1. The percentage of V.R. students enrolled in the Basic Speech-Communication course, Sp 100 (emphasis on theory); and the percentage of students in the same category who were enrolled in the Fundamentals of Speech course, Sp 111 (emphasis on performance in public speaking);

2. The relationship between the verbal reticence scores and the age, the academic or vocational goal, the grade point average as well as the number of credit hours accumulated;

3. The difference between the mean and standard deviation of the community college population and the population sampled from a four year university;

4. The direction of change in V.R. scores for individuals after they had taken the beginning speech class;

5. The percentage of reticent students who do not complete the beginning speech class either because they did not complete all of the course requirements or because they dropped the course.

Intuitively, we predicted that a larger proportion of community college students would fall into the V.R. category than would those enrolled at a large four year university. We had scant basis for forecasting the relationships between V.R. scores and age, grade point average, credit hours earned, or career goals. We did hope, however, that completion of a first term speech class would improve a student's conception of his verbal proficiency, increase his poise and confidence and thereby be reflected in lower V.R. scores.

MEASUREMENT

Background: The testing instrument used in this study was

developed by Myron W. Lustig, Department of Communication Arts, University of Wisconsin-Madison, in 1973.[2] His work followed that initiated by Muir,[3] Phillips,[4] Steward,[5] Lustig and Grove.[6] However, Lustig recognized that the nature of the reticent construct was amorphous. He also questioned the validity of existing instruments being used for the identification of reticent individuals,[7] due in part to the overly close identification of reticence with the classroom public speaking performance. Further, he discovered that the two characteristics describing the reticent and those characteristics which consistently appeared throughout the literature were, (1) the low quantity of verbal output of reticent persons in a variety of speaking situations and (2) the negative feelings the reticent has about his communicative behavior. The reticent feels "inadequate as an oral communicator, he feels he cannot interact effectively when he wants to or needs to, and quite understandably, he does not prefer or enjoy participating in communicative situations which require verbal facility."[8]

Based on these considerations, Lustig operationally defines the reticent individual as "a person whose average verbal output is characteristically low and who regards this behavior as problematic."[9]

Validity and Reliability Measures: The Verbal Reticence Test (V.R. Scale) developed by Lustig, consists of 23 Likert-type items administered in a five choice response format (see Table I). A

pool of 88 items were initially generated based on theoretical considerations; the items represented a variety of communicator self-perceptions ranging from communicative tendencies to attitudes about the communicator's inter-personal behavior.[10] During the time that Lustig was engaged in refining the instrument (measuring internal consistency, factor and cluster-analyses, item analysis and several measures of validity), the test was administered to a total of 920 undergraduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison during the period from 1972 to 1974.

The V.R. Scale used in this study was evaluated using three measures of reliability: item analysis, internal consistency tests, and test-retest measures. Internal consistency was measured by the Hoyt Reliability Coefficient (found to be internally consistent with a .92 coefficient), and the Pearson coefficient was the test-retest measure (reliability was .854).[11]

Validity measures included content validity using Principle Components Factor Analysis, construct validity measures comparing scores with other measures having theoretical relevance, and criterion-related validity requiring the presence of trained observers.

Despite the newness of the V-R Scale and Lustig's stated opinion regarding the need for additional research particularly with regard to criterion-related validity measures, the test seemed to be a reliable measuring instrument as well as the best measure immediately available.

RESULTS

Procedure: Students who enrolled in first term daytime speech classes at the community college were asked to complete the V-R Scale during the first week of classes. Administration of the test took place during Fall and Winter terms of 1974-1975. A total of 527 students were tested; and when the data was collected, it was totaled, indexed and correlated.[13]

Findings: The results supported our intuitive hypothesis. Whereas the mean scores of the university students reported by Lustig was 58.2%, the mean score of the community college sample was 61.01% fall term, and 61.90% winter term. The difference between the university and community college sample is statistically significant (the difference is significant at the .01 level).

Present measurement results indicate that individuals scoring one standard deviation above the mean are moderately reticent, the severity of their reticence increasing as their scores increase. Our sample indicates that 19.7% of all students enrolled in introductory speech classes on the community college campus[14] can be characterized as V.R., in contrast to 17.4% in the public speaking classes. The difference between the scores of the two groups suggests that, to a limited degree, a process of natural selection occurs with reticent students enrolling in the less anxiety-producing courses. In other words, students with severely negative perceptions of their speaking abilities are far more likely to seek

out classes which they perceive as less threatening classes in which more emphasis is placed on theory and less on actual speech performance.

Data gathered in response to the question of the relationship between V.R. scores and age, academic or vocational goals, grade point average, and number of college credit hours accumulated is shown in figures 1 through 4. The results suggest that students enrolled in vocational-technical programs are considerably more likely to be verbally reticent (42.8%) than college transfer (17.1%) or two-year degree students (20.6%) ($p<1.99$). Students who indicate uncertainty about the college program they choose were next highest in reticence scores (34.2%) (see figure 1).

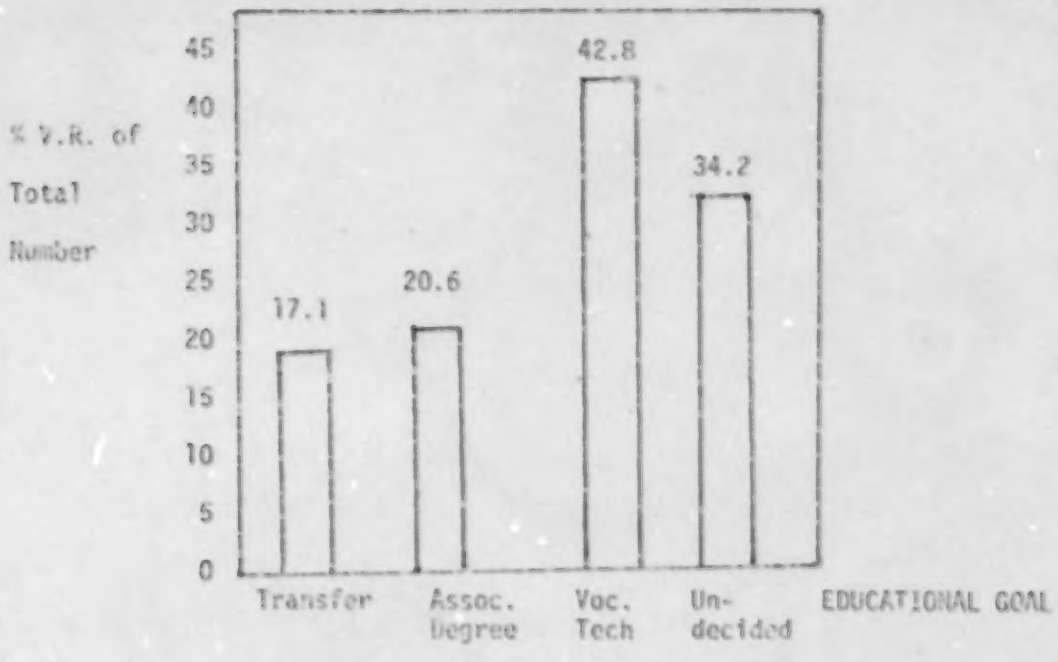

Figure 1

Relationship between educational goal and percentage of total number tested who score verbally reticent.

Our sample indicated that students who were new to the college, those who had accumulated less than 15 credit hours, were highest in V.R. as a group (28.8%), and those who had accumulated over 90 credit hours, lowest (6.6%) (see figure 2).

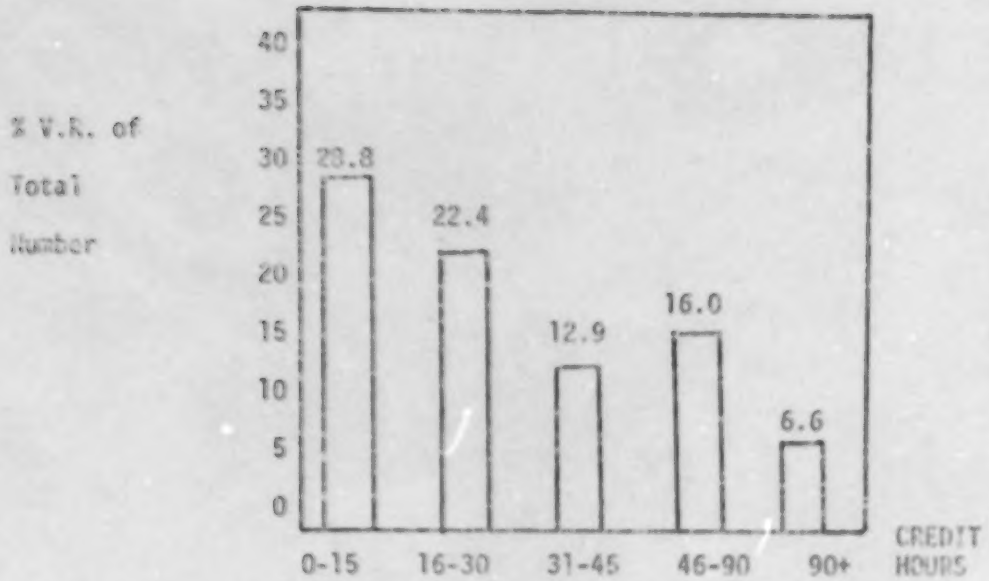

Figure 2

Relationship between number of credit hours earned and total percentage of those tested who score verbally reticent.

We also learned that the lower a student's grade point average, the higher the V.R. scores, up to a point, then the V.R. curve moves upward again when the grade point average is above 3.6 (see figure 3).

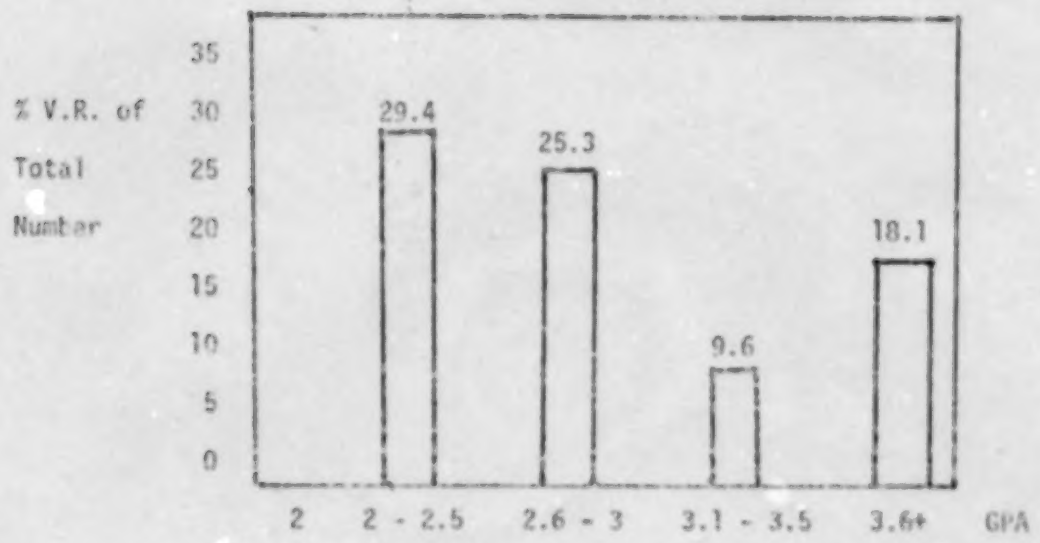

Figure 3

Relationship between grade point average of students tested and percentage of total number of students who score verbally reticent.

It would also appear that students are most likely to be reticent when they are between the ages of 18 and 25 or between the ages of 36 and 45, with percentages being 28.0 and 25.0 respectively. The least reticent age group appears to be under 18 or over 45 (see figure 4).

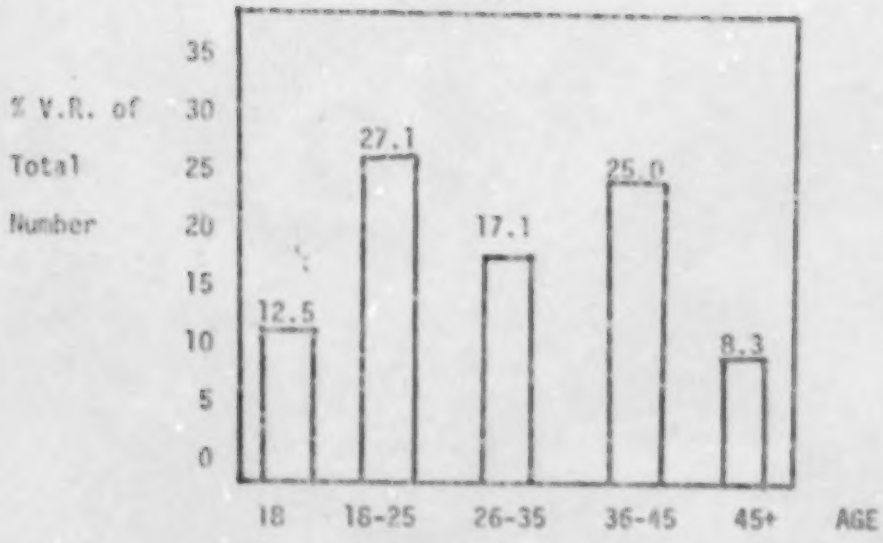

Figure 4

Relationship between age of students tested and percentage of students who score verbally reticent.

The results of the last two questions posed in our study are related and for that reason need to be treated jointly. We were, of course, interested in learning whether or not completion of one course in speech-communication would have an effect on V.R. scores. Lustig had already demonstrated in his reliability studies that little change occurred in the absence of specific communication training.[15] Other scholars maintained that there is a relatively stable pattern of verbal output for individuals over time.[16] However, we hoped that as a result of training, even though the training was not specialized nor designed particularly for the reticent student, our students would come to have a better understanding of themselves as communicators and a more realistic

and therefore more positive attitude toward communicative processes. This, we hoped, would move their V.R. scores toward the mean, reflecting improved self-concept, if not increased verbal output. But we also feared that reticent students, faced with the required participation in activities extremely uncomfortable for them, would not complete the speaking assignments or would withdraw from the speech course.

Both of these beliefs were justified. We noted that among the reticent students who did complete required course work, all but two showed improved scores at the end of the term, with one remaining unchanged. But nearly 50% of students who scored in the V.R. range, failed to finish the courses, either because they chose to withdraw or because they did not, for a variety of reasons, complete the assigned work.

Our findings tend to underscore the important purpose of the study: a determination of whether we, as speech-communication educators, were meeting the needs of our students. The results of our sample presented us with a dilemma. On the one hand, those students who remain in the classes apparently are aided in understanding and overcoming, to some extent, their fear of interacting with others. But many do not remain in the classes. Quite probably, many more with negative attitudes about their communication ability never do enroll in any speech class, even when one is required by their degree or certificate program.

The other data obtained in this study causes us to make the following generalizations: First, it seems apparent that community college students as a group, are more reluctant to engage in various kinds of verbal behavior than students enrolled in large four year universities. For this reason care should be taken in curriculum development to be certain that this characteristic is recognized in practice. Further, the newer a student is to the college environment, the more likely it is that the tendency toward verbal restraint will manifest itself.

The higher a student's grade point average, up to a point, the less reticent he is likely to be. Vocational-technical students seem to lack the same level of self assurance held by persons who intend to obtain associate or bachelors degrees. Again, these differences ought to be considered in plans for program development or change.

The V.R. Scale proved to be both a relatively manageable and a reliable screening instrument. It should be used with new, as well as similar populations. Additional work on the measure should continue, of course, so that information which is useful to the speech-communication educator and theoretician can be generated. Information about the underlying cognitive and social constituents of verbal predispositions will assist educators in determining exactly what impact these predispositions have on certain classes of verbal behavior. This information in turn will help us in developing better approaches and more appropriate programs which may help those with "communication-bound anxiety."[17]

TABLE 1

THE V-R SCALE

Please do not spend a great deal of time on the following items. Try to answer as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers and therefore your first reaction is important. Please answer every question.

If you really agree with the statement, circle YES. If you agree in general, circle yes. If you don't know how you feel, circle ?. If you disagree in general, circle no. If you really disagree, circle NO.

For example, if you really agree with the following statement, you would circle YES:

Wisconsin winters are cold. (YES) yes ? no NO

1.	Acquaintances consider me to be the silent type.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
*2.	I enjoy a full, rich social life.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
*3.	In most situations, I generally know what to say to people.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
*4.	I am basically an outgoing person.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
5.	My friends would characterize me as the silent type.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
*6.	In general, I try to strike up a conversation when I'm with other people.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
7.	I frequently hesitate before I speak.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
8.	When I'm with other people, I often have difficulty thinking of the right things to talk about.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
9.	I feel insecure when speaking to others.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
*10.	I enjoy participating in group discussions.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
11.	I don't like to talk much.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
12.	I am a quiet person.	YES	yes	?	no	NO
13.	I often don't express my attitudes and feelings in normal conversations.	YES	yes	?	no	NO

14. I like to avoid too many social contacts. YES yes ? no NO

*15. I enjoy talking. YES yes ? no NO

16. When I'm in a group situation (4-8 people), others generally talk more than me. YES yes ? no NO

*17. People can usually count on me to keep a conversation going. YES yes ? no NO

18. I consider myself to be the silent type. YES yes ? no NO

19. I don't think I'm as good in conversation situations as are other people. YES yes ? no NO

20. It's hard to keep a conversation going with strangers. YES yes ? no NO

21. I prefer to listen rather than talk in most social situations. YES yes ? no NO

22. I tend to avoid interacting with others. YES yes ? no NO

23. When I talk with other people, I frequently feel they are not listening to me. YES yes ? no NO

Scoring Key: YES = 5 yes = 4 ? = 3 no = 2 NO = 1

Starred items indicate reverse scoring.

Notes

1. The term introduced by Frances Laura Muir, Case Studies of Selected Examples of Reticence and Fluency (unpublished Masters Thesis, Washington State University: Pullman, Washington, 1964), p. 2.

2. Myron W. Lustig, "Verbal Reticence: A Reconceptualization and Preliminary Scale Development" (Paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech-Communication Association: Chicago, 1974).

3. Muir.

4. Gerald M. Phillips, "The Problem of Reticence," The Pennsylvania Speech Annual, 22 (1968), p. 28.

5. Larry A. Steward, Attitudes Toward Communication: The Content Analysis of Interviews with Eight Reticent and Eight Non-Reticent College Students (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Pennsylvania State University: University Park, Pa., 1968).

6. Myron W. Lustig and Theodore G. Grove, "Interaction Analysis of Small Problem Solving Groups Containing Reticent and Non-Reticent Members," Western Speech, 39 (1975), 155-164.

7. James C. McCroskey, "Measures of Communication-Bound Anxiety," Speech Monographs, 37 (1970), p. 272; Gerald M. Phillips and Eugene E. Erickson, "R-Scale," (Washington State University, Pullman, Wash., 1964). Cited in Theodore S. Hopf, "Reticence and the Oral Interpretation Teacher," Speech Teacher, 19 (1970), 268-271.

8. Lustig, "Verbal Reticence", p. 4.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., p. 6.

11. Ibid., p. 7.

12. Ibid., p. 9.

13. My thanks to Robert Finnell, Mathematics Instructor, Portland Community College. for writing the program and supervising each step in the computer analysis.

Notes, (Con.)

14. Portland Community College, Portland, Oregon has five campuses. The tests reported in this paper were conducted at the two largest campuses, Sylvania and Cascade.

15. Lustig, "Verbal Reticence," p. 6.

16. Edgar F. Borgatta and Robert F. Bales, "Interaction of Individuals in Reconstituted Groups," in A. Paul Hare, Edgar F. Borgatta, and Robert F. Bales (eds.), Small Groups: Studies in Social Interaction (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 377.

17. McCroskey, p. 272.

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